

Mandatory Report

The white mental health system fails people of color

I am a mandatory reporter. That means I am legally bound to report you to the authorities, if I suspect, due to my training, that you are an immediate danger to yourself or vulnerable others. It also means that not only must I report the citizen to the system, but I must also report to the citizens that the system will fail them.



I am a mandatory reporter for a system I would not trust a single blood relative to. Nor could I wholeheartedly, unreservedly, recommend or refer any person who looks like a blood relative of mine. I can't even honestly say that even if you are blond-haired, blue-eyed and wealthy that the system will take adequate care of you. For the most part the system will do well by you, by many accounts, if you are white, but even a lot of white people question that. My colleagues all agree that "the system sucks," but they don't change its dysfunctional status quo.

This mandatory report is triggered by the death of someone, an African-American woman — one of many self-referred to the system — whom the system failed for the usual predictable and preventable reasons. Those reasons are primarily that people receive either culturally competent care or patterned neglect, based not on the most current science but on the prejudice of those ostensibly providing the care.

She, like the other three African-American women at a local treatment facility, voluntarily recognized she had an addiction problem. A woman of color doing an internship at that treatment agency found herself being racially harassed by the staff there, as well as witnessing racial maltreatment of the clients of color by the staff.

If you have a problem of some sort, whether indigent or armed with adequate financial resources, if you are the wrong color, the mental health and addictions cavalry ain't comin' to rescue you. Indeed, they will discharge you early for "treatment noncompliance," or denial, or "you just haven't hit your bottom yet." But of course if you in effect live life on the bottom, there is no bottom to hit. What is needed is to follow the science, not 12-step based prejudice. It is from scientific evidence that we get concepts of self medication.

As an addictions and mental health professional of color with nearly a 40-year career, nearly 25 years in this state alone, I never have the option of being culturally incompetent with white clients — even racist skinheads, of which I've had four in Oregon. Is it so much of a stretch to see that African-American women in Oregon might be self-medicating themselves due to the quadruple whammy of classism, sexism, racism and heterosexism and the abuse suffered thereby? Is it possible that white addictions professionals could learn to impart appropriate coping skills to those clients rather than the hand of contempt they have shown? Here is the standard I'd like Oregon's addictions and mental health system, even the so-called justice system, to operate at: Every person entering as a client be treated not only with the most current evidence-based science, but where the science is lacking (because it often is), they be treated along the lines suggested by community defined evidence. That is: Discrimination exists, and you teach as part of treatment the successful skills to deal with it, or else you get repetitive relapse born of despair and frustration. Instead, majority white treatment personnel discharge clients of color according to their personal prejudices when clients raise real or imagined issues of prejudice. Community defined evidence as well as empirical science have shown patterned discrimination exists in the lives of people facing addiction issues.

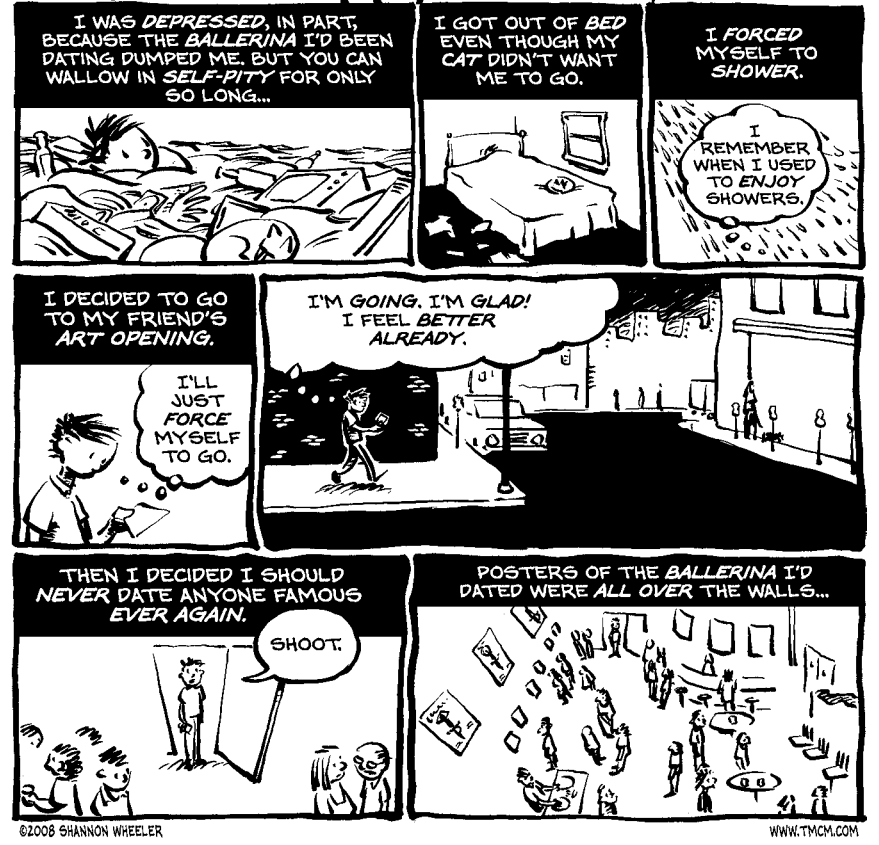
The science says that even when incarcerated black people get substance abuse treatment, not only do they benefit from it, but they remain clean and sober. But generally they remain either undiagnosed or untreated. It still remains true: "White kids get rehab, Black kids get jail," even if they are arrested at the same time showing the same symptoms. Equitable treatment would be a nice cure.

As a side note, I consulted with the state authority when the harassed intern described above asked me what to do. I was informed by the area representative that the law reads that she must first complain to the agency, then have the issue resolved or not internally — and then then the state can act along with acting on behalf of the clients. I asked her to stay another week and initiate the complaint process. She didn't last four days.

The intern quit before making a complaint because she found it so intolerable. The African-American woman in treatment who independently confirmed what transpired died this winter.

Mark Harris is a substance abuse prevention coordinator at Lane Community College.

How to Be Happy (OPERA CONT.) by Shannon Wheeler



Letters TO THE EDITOR

SMACKED BY REALITY

Is it me, or does any one else see what is happening to our planet with all of these latest wraths of natural destruction that have killed thousands around the globe, not to mention the record touchdown of tornadoes in our own country? Well, if you're choosing to acknowledge and then ignore these such tragedies, then this reality has not slapped you in the face hard enough. With all the signs that are happening right before our own eyes, we should be changing the way we treat each other, our mother and our ever-growing needy, greedy adult sitters, a.k.a. our government.

Why on earth are we waiting for change in another leader? We all know it takes more than one person and one vice person to try to change what has been left for them to clean up by a military monger who made a fine mess of our financial stability by funneling our money into a war rather than our own backyard. Any leader who does such things — lie about weapons of mass destruction or allow his own citizens to be accused of being terrorists or beaten or shot to death by police who once served and protected us citizens — should himself be held accountable for all the losses we have faced.

Are Americans just so damn afraid of our government that we will let our political officials get away with just about anything? The answer is yes because it takes fools like us to ignore what is happening to people around the world, not to mention in our own backyard.

Our leaders should be ashamed of themselves for not boycotting the Olympics in China. Jimmy Carter had no problem boycotting the Olympics, so why is Bush pushing us forward towards a nation that sets boundaries and limitations on its people's freedoms?

Trazy Maholney
Eugene

NO RIGHTS FOR ROBOTS

Attorney General Hardy Myers is now enforcing a new Oregon law against the

robotic phone calls from Barack Obama that I complained about in my May 1 online letter "Can't Hang Up."

Ironically, it was the Clinton campaign that finally got the attention of the Attorney General, but the campaign was also found to be violating the Oregon do not call law.

Before Meyer's public announcement, my friends were probably dismissing my complaints as paranoid delusions because they had not received any such calls. Despite my numerous complaints, the Obama campaign never responded.

However, *The Oregonian* (5/16, p. A1) quoted an apology from Nick Shapiro, spokesman for Obama's Oregon campaign.

I accept Obama's apology. I doubt the campaign would have displayed its toll free number on caller ID if it was intentionally violating the law.

Opponents to this new law say it violates the free speech rights of politicians.

Baloney! Our Constitution does not give robots any rights of citizenship.

Thomas Kraemer
Corvallis

SIGNS EVERYWHERE

In addressing the many views of climate change that have been represented, it is provocative to also examine several crises that are occurring simultaneously all over the world. Australia's drought has resulted in a 90 percent decrease of its rice exports as compared to only five years ago, which has serious consequences on certain countries that import the crop, like Senegal and Haiti, which recently had massive food riots. Problems are exacerbated in using arable land for vineyards in Australia or corn for ethanol in the Midwest. Tornadoes have caused massive destruction from Myanmar to Oklahoma. At home, we are all painfully aware of the dramatic increase in gas prices, and the mortgage crisis has had huge effects that have rippled across the world.

This is all depressing stuff, but it is possibly no coincidence that this pattern of crises is a sign we are all interconnected. We are beginning to see possible stepping